(b) if so, the time-frame to meet the target;

(c) the anticipated demand of connections; and

(d) whether Government have necessary infrastructure including finance to achieve the targets?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) and (b) Agreements have been signed with M/s. Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) in November, 2004 for extending subsidy support for the provision of Village Public Telephones (VPTs) in 66,822 unconnected villages, excluding villages which are depopulated, naxalite/insurgency infested, having population of less than hundred persons and those lying in deep forest areas. These 66,822 villages are likely to be provided with VPTs in a phased manner within three years i.e. by November, 2007.

(c) As on 31.12.2004, there is a demand of 13,48,624 telephone connections registered with BSNL in rural areas of the country.

(d) Support from Universal Service Obligation (USO) Fund is being provided for the provision of VPTs in unconnected villages as mentioned at (a) and (b) above.

Burden of landline subscribers

343. SHRIMATI SARLA MAHESHWARI : Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Access Deficit Charges in India is the lowest in the world;

(b) on what ground the ADC is further reduced;

(c) whether this would not increase the burden on landline subscribers in the country especially in rural and backward areas; and

(d) what steps Government propose to take to meet the situation?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) No, Sir.

(b) As per Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) there has been reduction in ADC per minute rates which has become possible as a result of subscriber growth especially in Mobile segment and resultant increases in the minutes that fund the ADC.

(c) No, Sir.

(d) Does not arise in view of above.

Benefits to an average MTNL subscriber

344. SHRIMATI JAYA BACHCHAN: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that despite increase in the profits of MTNL no improvement have been brought in the phone network for the benefit of average subscriber;

(b) whether it is also a fact that phone call costs, internet connectivity and durations of calls are still deterrent factors for marginal subscribers such as students, pensioners and other fixed income groups; and

(c) whether Government are considering any steps to help such subscribers and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) to (c) The information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.

Government's policies in respect of Nepal

345. SHRI S.S. AHLUWALIA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that, especially from our national security point of view, stability, peace and economic progress of Nepal has been significant;

(b) whether Government have been pursuing appropriate policies in respect of neighbouring countries, particularly, Nepal;

(c) salient features thereof, including of the status of monitoring